

IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

UNITED WAY'S EDUCATION ACTION PLAN



LIVE UNITED



HELLO

United Way's focus on advancing the common good is particularly relevant and timely in this challenging economic environment. Our mission – to improve lives through impact strategies that mobilize the caring power of communities – is more important than ever.

There's no question that our strategic imperative to advance the common good – by improving education, income and health – is also a moral imperative.

These are the building blocks of a good life – for today and tomorrow. A good education is fundamental to each of these. It is critical for a good job, one that provides a good standard of living and health insurance. It's also the foundation of a strong future: a child's success in work, school and life starts with a good education, especially in the early years.

It's our obligation – as parents, citizens and United Way leaders – to mobilize our communities around these critical education issues. That's what it will take to ensure all children come to school ready to succeed, read on grade level, navigate middle school and graduate high school to go onto work or college.

That is what United Way's education goal – cutting the high school dropout rate in half over the next decade – is all about. Many United Ways across our movement are taking leadership action to meet these goals. From early childhood education through dropout prevention, our system is on the right track, doing the right things and making progress.

However, to truly move the needle on education in 10 years, we must all focus our efforts on genuine outcome-based strategies. We know this approach works. At the national, state, and local level, we must lead with United Way's unique strength: a national network of leaders mobilized around pressing community issues. We must leverage our partnerships, and realize our public engagement potential.

United Way of America has developed a strategic plan to guide our education work. It is built on national, state and local leadership, with United Ways and our partners. The approach and its benchmarks are spelled out in this brochure. You'll also learn how United Ways can benefit from these efforts to advance your education impact work.

When United Ways work collaboratively, we can bring about tremendous positive change. Just imagine what we can do when we put our focus and our force behind education. I am confident that, together, United Ways can lead a social change movement to improve education for all our children, community by community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian A. Gallagher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brian A. Gallagher
President and CEO



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KEYS TO SUCCESS

Look for this box throughout the brochure to learn more about how your United Way can take advantage of these opportunities.

I. THE EDUCATION CHALLENGE

United Way has put a stake in the ground on education. Our goal is to cut the number of high school dropouts in half by 2018.

It's an ambitious goal. This year, 1.2 million high school seniors will not graduate. That means 6,000 students will dropout **today**. The numbers are even grimmer for young people of color.

Every parent's dream is for our children to succeed — and for their success to surpass ours. But today's young Americans are less likely to earn a diploma than their parents, a distinction not shared by any other industrialized country.

United Way wants to change that reality, and to boost every child's chance for success in school, work and life. Our core strengths — a national network, committed partners and public engagement capacity — position us well to activate this social change movement.

Improving education requires that all of us — public, private and non-profit sectors — work together in new ways. It will take a laser-like focus. It will demand more from us and from our partners.

It will require that we stick with it for the long haul, in a culture that wants quick fixes. And it will demand a clear-eyed view of the problem and its roots.

Tackling high school dropout rates means reversing some very discouraging statistics:

- 46% of children start school without the skills they need to succeed¹;
- 67% of fourth-graders cannot read proficiently²;
- 25% of high school students fail to graduate on time³;
- 15% of young adults are neither working or attending school⁴.

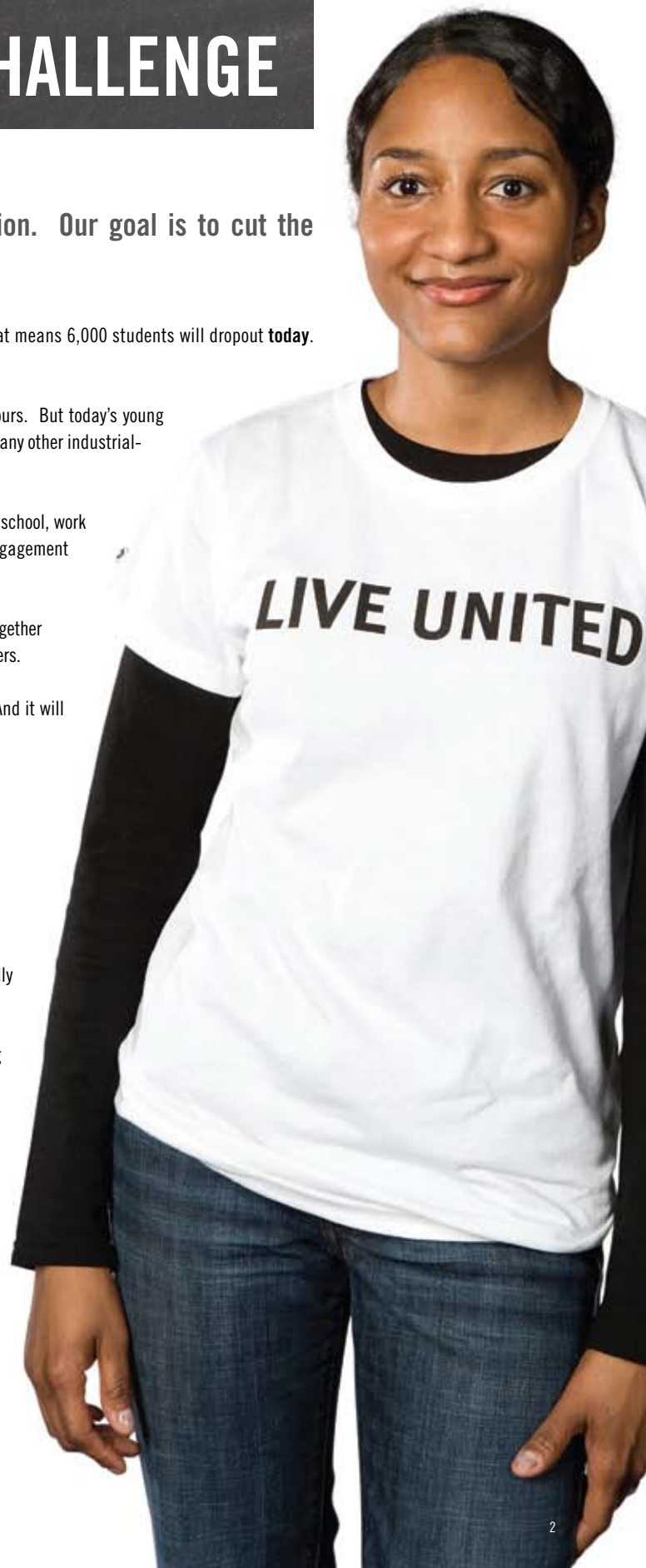
The truth is, high school dropouts are more than 12 years in the making. They usually start school behind, and research shows that most never catch up.

Disadvantaged children come to school at least two years behind their peers in pre-reading skills.⁵ For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still be struggling to read in 3rd grade.⁶ Children without reading skills by 3rd grade are unlikely to graduate from high school.⁷ And research shows that grades and absenteeism rates by 3rd grade predict with *90% accuracy* whether children will dropout.⁸

That's why the entire education continuum — from birth through 21 — must be in our sightline if we are to move the needle on high school graduation.

Nor does the education challenge end with high school graduation. Most employers and college professors say today's high school graduates don't have the skills to succeed in work or college.⁹ Meanwhile, the stakes keep rising in our global economy.

To develop a strong workforce of the future — one that can help America compete and help individuals be successful — our investment in children's education must start early and be sustained.



II. UNITED WAY'S RESPONSE

United Way of America is forging a new, ambitious education path, built on national strategies and local innovations, and rooted in research. Recognizing the long-term, cumulative nature of success, we've developed a 3-4-5 approach.

If United Way engages all three drivers at the national, state and local levels, puts all four strategies into play and tackles all five education focus areas along the birth to 21 education continuum — we *can* move the needle on education.

3

DRIVERS OF POWERFUL SOCIAL CHANGE: position, partnerships and public engagement.



4

KEY STRATEGIES: building capacity of our system, incubating innovation for rapid replication, leveraging partnerships and engaging leaders.

Building Capacity

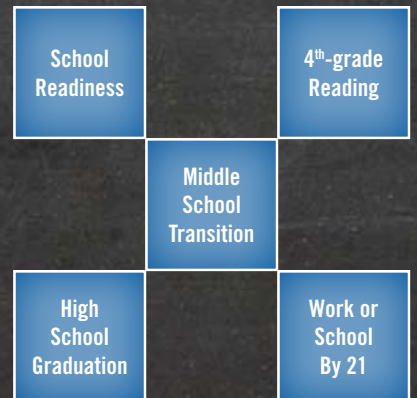
Incubating Innovation

Leveraging Partnerships

Engaging Leaders

5

FOCUS AREAS: school readiness, 4th-grade reading, middle school transition, high school graduation and youth in school or work by 21.



SNAPSHOT

UNITED WAY & HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION

Detroit leads the nation in high school dropout rates, with 24% to 58% of students graduating depending on the method of calculation. It is home to half of the nation's 60 "dropout factory" high schools. Michigan also leads the nation in unemployment, with rates over 10%.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan is working with cross-sector community partners to boost graduation rates. Together, they hosted a drop-out prevention summit, working with UWA's partner, America's Promise Alliance. Teams from 35 high schools with the worst rates took part: students, parents, teachers, faith leaders, labor leaders and others who will continue to work together inside schools to begin a strategic planning process for improving school success for city youth.

Then United Way and its partners launched a \$10 million prevention initiative (the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund) to target high schools with dropout rates of 40% or higher. Already, \$4 million has been raised, despite the economic contractions in Southeastern Michigan. Partnerships among school districts, non-profits, government, foundations and businesses have been key to success, including a partnership with AT&T Michigan, which contributed \$1 million.

The investments will bring proven "turnaround leaders" — companies that impacted schools in similar urban areas — to work with schools in an intensive five-year effort. Five schools have already launched their turnaround efforts. The project also includes:

- Creating report cards for local school boards on student achievement.
- Providing incentives to recruit the most talented teachers to high poverty schools.
- Increasing public awareness efforts, particularly among corporate leaders and philanthropists.

Policy advocacy is also playing a role. Leaders of the Venture Fund successfully advocated for state funding of \$15 million — during a severe budget crisis — for failing high schools throughout the state. They're also advocating for laws that will ensure that the best people are working in the neediest schools.

Results will take a while to see; this kind of change is like turning a ship. But this partnership and innovative thinking is a promising start.

KEYS TO SUCCESS UNITED WAY ROLES

When United Way takes on an issue, it adds momentum to the community change process. United Ways are neutral conveners, galvanizing a wide variety of stakeholders. The system can deploy unique assets such as:

- Leadership and collaboration
- Business relationships
- Knowledge of community needs
- Data gathering
- Funding
- Communications and marketing

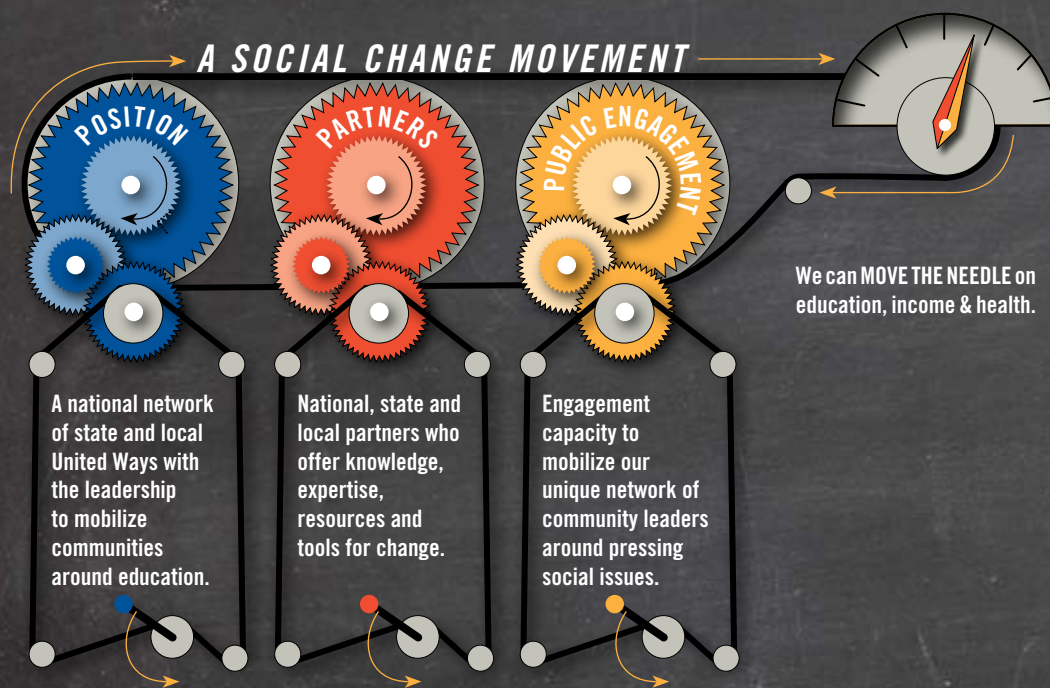
United Ways are uniquely positioned to do this work. Why? Our system brings three powerful **drivers of social change** to the education challenge:

1. **Position** – A national network of state and local United Ways with the leadership to mobilize communities around education;
2. **Partners** – National, state and local partners who offer knowledge, expertise, resources and tools for change;
3. **Public Engagement** – Capacity to tap into unparalleled networks of community leaders who can make things happen.

As a catalyst for change, United Ways already generate \$1 billion a year for children and youth, part of the \$4 billion invested annually in communities. And we leverage those resources, enlisting millions of Americans to give, advocate and volunteer.

The impact that United Ways and their partners have on education can ripple through communities, improving health and financial stability. These building blocks of a good life are critical to lasting community change.

United Way's three powerful DRIVERS of change to improve education, income, and health.



Engaging these **THREE DRIVERS** will activate our network, mobilize our partners and build public support.

III. UNITED WAY'S EDUCATION STRATEGY

What will it take to move the needle on education? Skillful planning, targeted action, and early, sustained investment – nationally and locally – is essential. And it must be done along the entire education continuum, from birth to 21.

However, sustained investment and action don't happen in a vacuum. That is why United Way of America will work with pilot United Ways to support research-based, proven strategies, and provide funding and intensive support to help execute strategies effectively. We'll do that with an eye to strategic targeting – focusing on areas with pressing graduation problems that also have the leadership, energy and momentum necessary to ramp up the best ideas for maximum impact.

State and local United Ways will mobilize community leaders around the birth to 21 education continuum, developing innovative solutions that can be scaled up. Sustained focus across our system – with common milestones – will move the needle faster.



Education Framework

This theory of change is built on United Way's foundational community impact model, focusing on outcomes and goals for a community, and drawing on the strength of existing partnerships, relationships, and good ideas already underway.

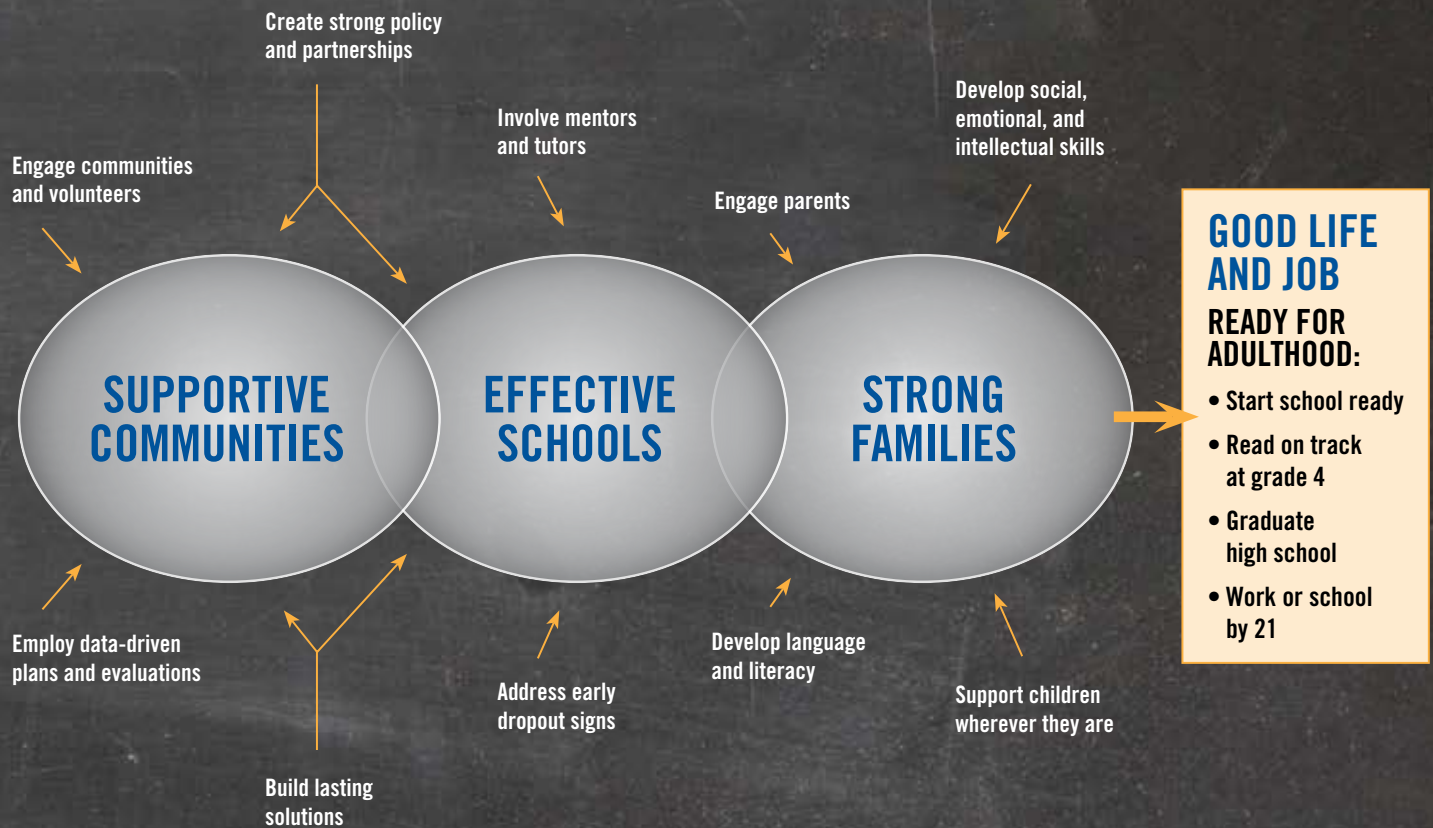
Supportive communities, effective schools and strong families must be in place, along with strategies rooted in research, such as:

- Honing in on language and literacy skill-building, starting at birth;
- Engaging volunteers, including mentors and tutors, especially in the early years;
- Engaging parents and families;
- Being alert to early warning signs (like chronic absenteeism in early grades), with action plans in place;
- Building strong public-private partnerships;
- Mobilizing leaders from all sectors around effective strategies;
- Impacting policies, programs and budgets at local, state and national levels;
- Insisting on data-driven plans and evaluation.

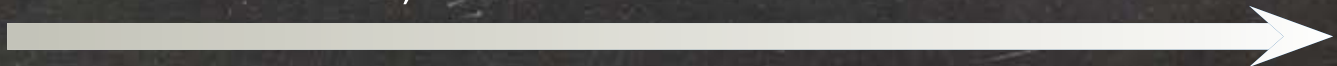


THEORY OF CHANGE

What it Takes to Meet United Way's Education Goals



CONTINUED SUPPORT, FOCUS AND ENGAGEMENT



Four Key Strategies

Four strategies will activate our drivers of change — position, partnership and public engagement:

- 1. BUILDING CAPACITY:** Investing in **targeted communities** to demonstrate, adapt and replicate high-impact strategies;
- 2. INCUBATING INNOVATION:** Providing tools, technical assistance and creating a continuous learning loop for **rapid uptake and scaling of effective strategies** throughout the United Way system;
- 3. LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS:** Strengthening and supporting **targeted national partnerships**;
- 4. ENGAGING LEADERS:** Boosting public engagement around education at national, state and local levels.

State and local United Ways are engaged in pilot education initiatives involving each of the strategies. But over the long term, *all four strategies must be in play over time*, driving community action on the five focus areas of school readiness, fourth grade reading, middle school transition, high school completion and post-secondary education.

The success of each of these strategies requires a renewed focus on and commitment to developing data systems that support tracking progress at all levels of the United Way system. Successful implementation of these strategies will require:

- Laser-like attention to results;
- Disciplined use of data to drive investments;
- Enhancements and supports for new data systems that look across programs — especially education and out-of-school initiatives — and link national, state and community data systems.



1. BUILDING CAPACITY

We're committed to investing in the capacity of the national United Way network, with a special focus on building leadership to mobilize communities. To build our system's collective capacity as effective community change agents, we will:

- Direct support to local and state United Ways to demonstrate results;
- Develop and share tools and technical assistance — ranging from frameworks and messaging to prefabricated products for local and statewide work;
- Create in-person and virtual opportunities to share knowledge and continue peer learning.

We will also tap into and share state and local United Way expertise with a new **field faculty**. Drawing on experts from the United Way field (and partner organizations) much like community colleges use adjunct faculty, field faculty will be central to a new dissemination and technical assistance system. We want to identify and share best practices in key focus areas — quickly — across the system.

UWA Key Objectives:

- Increase number of local and state United Ways effectively working to improve key indicators in the five focus areas;
- Rapidly harvest and spread best practices across the system so that innovation can be incubated and shared.

UWA Target (in five years):

- **200 local or state United Ways** using training, a technical assistance tool or other system-wide support to improve educational outcomes for children and youth;
- **20 field faculty** in place, including national partner faculty;
- **Tools and learning opportunities** in place.

KEYS TO SUCCESS BEING AN EDUCATION PILOT SITE

How can United Ways take part in national education pilot initiatives? United Way of America's request for proposals (RFPs) will depend on the project and funder, but we'll look for pilots that can show:

- Strategic approach to community impact
- Focus on education
- Effective, education-related community change strategies
- Inclusive community partnerships
- Authentic engagement with diverse communities
- Effective mobilization of leaders around action, from educating and informing to policy advocacy
- Effective use of research-based practices
- Commitment to data-driven work
- Measurement of progress and results
- Alignment within the organization to support education strategies

2. INCUBATING INNOVATION

Targeted community capacity building and innovation is an effective approach. But we could move faster.

So we'll pursue a **laboratory approach**, fueling good ideas to be tested in the laboratory of United Way-led community action. And we'll share successful results widely – and quickly – to encourage **replication of success** across the United Way system.

This approach will shine a light on what works. Best practices, approaches and strategies will be identified and shared, tactics mapped out and tools developed for rapid dissemination across United Ways.

At the national level, we'll facilitate technical assistance, training, tools and learning communities (both online and in person) to boost peer sharing of knowledge, resources, and lessons learned.

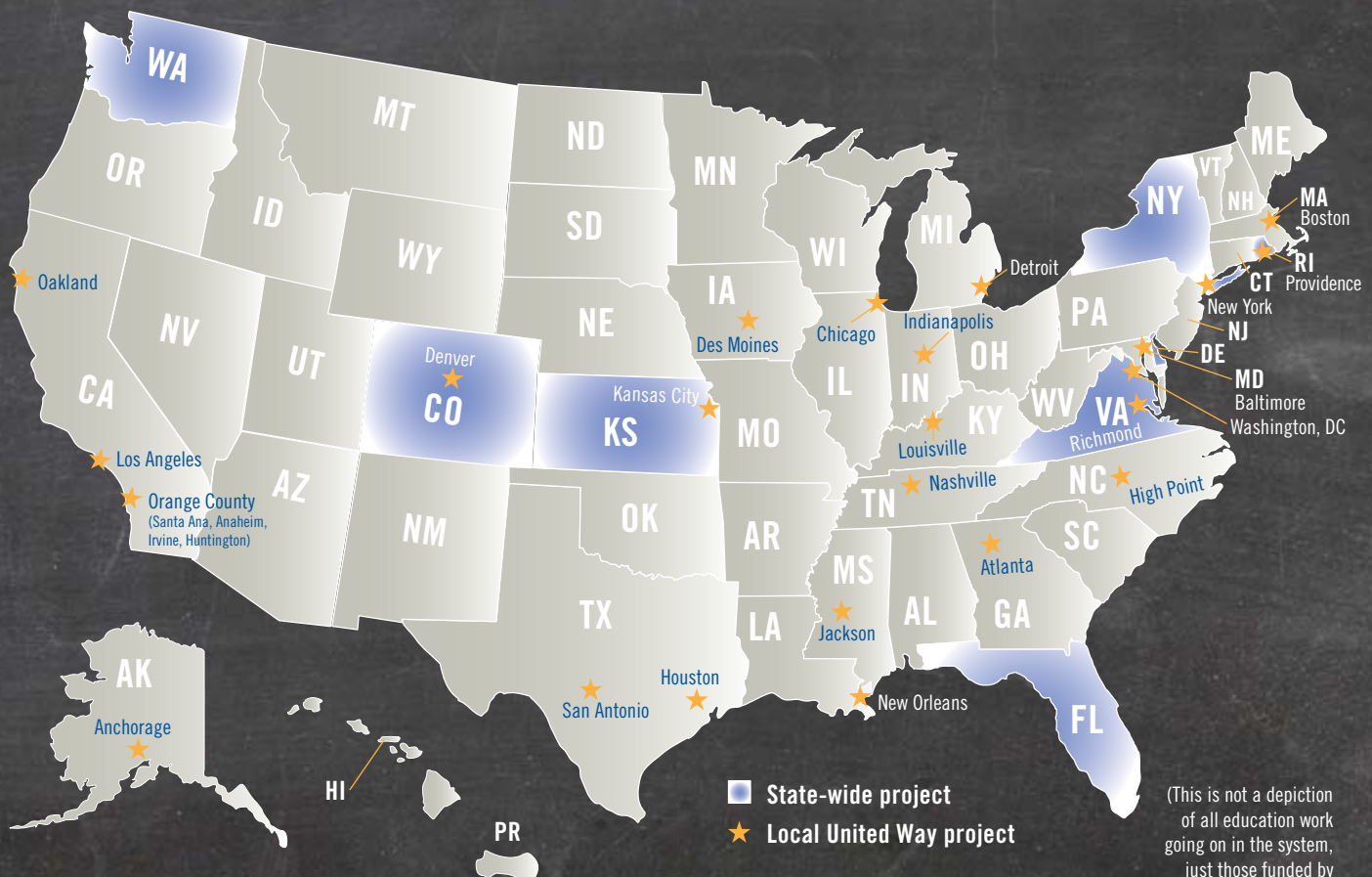
UWA Key Objectives:

- Incubate innovation and support its application through United Ways;
- Demonstrate the power and impact of United Ways to deliver results;
- Document promising practices.

UWA Target (in five years):

- **100 local and state United Ways** receive and use focused resources, technical assistance, learning opportunities and other help to develop effective education activities.

United Ways across the country
are already undertaking pilot education initiatives
funded by national partnerships.



3. LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

The spirit of LIVE UNITED means doing more together than we can do separately. Strategic partnerships are part of United Way's approach to moving the education needle. Partners can leverage our best efforts, and expand our collective capacities.

Prominent national organizations – the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Altria Group, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Birth to Five Policy Alliance – are already supporting United Way's national education work. We're partnering with many of the nation's top education, research and business organizations focused on education, and are joining with labor and teachers organizations representing diverse populations.

To leverage national partnerships, we'll link local United Ways with affiliates of national partners; facilitate access to partners' expertise, tools and resources; and share ideas with national partners to shape cross-cutting collaborative efforts that have a multiplier effect.

That's why we're working with the Forum for Youth Investment to activate the **Ready by 21 Partnership**. It's a unique collaboration of national, state and local non-profit, business, government and education leaders' organizations:

- American Association of School Administrators
- America's Promise Alliance (which includes 200 individual groups)
- Child Trends
- Corporate Voices for Working Families
- High Scope Foundation
- National Collaboration for Youth
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- The Finance Project
- The Search Institute

United Way joined the Ready by 21 Partnership as the signature mobilization partner in 2008 as testament to the importance of community leadership in education improvement. As United Ways tackle education impact work, Ready by 21 partners will provide knowledge, expertise, resources and tools for change.

Our other vital national education partnership is the **Birth to Five Policy Alliance**. The Alliance's goal is to shift the odds for the very young. It's a pooled fund that supports state-level policy through research and policy analysis; outreach and support for state policy makers; and building champions among key stakeholders. Our partners in this work include:

- Build Initiative
- Center for Law and Social Policy
- Committee for Economic Development
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
- National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
- National Center for Children in Poverty
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- National Council of La Raza
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child
- Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Urban Institute
- ZERO TO THREE

UWA Key Objective:

- Mobilize partners to share with United Ways and facilitate more United Way-partner connections.

UWA Target (in five years):

- **Focused, collaborative technical assistance and training projects** developed with Ready by 21 and Birth to Five Policy Alliance partners that help United Ways work more effectively with education, business and policy leaders;
- **UWA working with new and diverse strategic partners**, including organizations representing educators, labor and diverse families;
- **New materials, resources and learning opportunities** created for United Ways to tap into partner expertise.

4. ENGAGING LEADERS

Building on our **Give, Advocate, Volunteer** call to action, United Way will strengthen our efforts to identify, educate, persuade and mobilize volunteers around education solutions – public, private and non-profit – at local, state and national levels.

United Way has an unparalleled network of volunteers – more than 1.1 million community and business leaders, and more than 500,000 workplaces – who want to do more than write a check. In 2007, we saw a 4.7% increase in volunteers, performing almost 11 million hours of service. Our research shows that public response and enthusiasm for LIVE UNITED has the potential to boost volunteerism even more.

United Way volunteers are eager to work with local schools, families and youth to create necessary change. They can bring financial and human resources to strengthen school-community-family partnerships through United Way networks of agencies, volunteers, and donors.

Based on United Way's early childhood education work in the last 19 years, we know that volunteers can be effectively engaged around three core areas to make a difference:

1. **Public awareness** – elevating the issue, challenges and solutions underway around education from birth through 21;
2. **Parent education and engagement** – supporting, engaging and involving families all along the education continuum;
3. **Community mobilization** – galvanizing the community around education solutions, which could include

KEYS TO SUCCESS EARLY LEARNING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Following the model established with our early childhood work, effective strategies by United Ways to shape public engagement include:

- Issue identification, research and analysis;
- Public awareness and education on key issues;
- Voter registration and education;
- Participation in referenda or initiative campaigns;
- Grassroots organizing and communication with local leaders;
- Testimony before governmental bodies;
- Advocacy for or against legislation, regulations or agency policies;
- Service on government commissions and task forces.

volunteerism activities like Days of Action or mentoring in the classroom, or advocacy activities like deploying business leaders as champions.

We've looked at early childhood education volunteer engagement through different lenses. *Born Learning* is a public engagement campaign focused on supporting early childhood education. Through the community impact lens, we've created products and offered strategies for United Ways to engage companies as sponsors for *Born Learning* parent education materials. Through the marketing communications lens, we've created promotional tools and templates to help companies elevate their brand by supporting *Born Learning* campaigns. Through the resource development lens, we've created tip sheets, training and frameworks for using *Born Learning* products in a year-round campaign strategy. And through the public engagement and advocacy lenses, we've helped United Ways make the early learning case to business leaders to enlist and enroll them as champions for early learning strategies.

This work has strengthened United Way collaboration and partnerships, and helped fine-tune volunteer engagement strategies that cut across United Way functional silos. It offers a model for effective community impact outreach, as well as a platform for the United Way call to action to Give, Advocate, Volunteer. Using this approach – and broadening it to other aspects of the birth to 21 education continuum – is a fundamental part of our strategy to reduce high school dropout rates.

Public engagement can also be an effective strategy to support advocacy. Any lasting education change can be expected to include policy advocacy at some point. Public will must be built up to ensure policies, regulations, programs and budgets are created and sustained to support education from birth through 21.

Whatever it takes to improve education in your community, look at volunteer engagement as one way to fuel that long-term strategy.

UWA Key Objective:

- Mobilize leaders in education through cross-cutting strategies, which could include year-round campaign, volunteer engagement, customer relationship management and advocacy tactics.

UWA Target (in five years):

- **200 United Ways will be effectively engaging volunteers in education**, from public awareness, parent education/engagement to community mobilization.
- **At least 8,000 business leaders and donors** in the United Way network are identified, educated, persuaded and mobilized as education champions.



BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TOOLS

UWA has created communications tools to equip private sector volunteers to speak out in support of United Way's early childhood education work. These tools make it easy for volunteers to make the case – with video, annotated PowerPoint presentation and adaptable fact sheet – to fellow business leaders in any setting. They can easily be repurposed for any education goal.

Find the tools at:
www.bornlearning.org.

KEYS TO SUCCESS EDUCATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To deepen year-round education engagement and communication strategies, try the following:

- Pull people into the organization through volunteering, like Day of Action, or building a *Born Learning* Trail for children and parents. Use community conversations or listening sessions to learn what's on people's minds. Reflect on what you heard and use it to shape your work.
- Hold a town hall meeting to let the public and media know how your United Way is focusing on education. Bring fresh data to the conversation. Showcase your progress or (if you're farther down the road) proven solutions with return-on-investment data.
- Create briefings and share briefing papers on proven solutions of innovating ideas that your United Way is pursuing or facilitating.
- Step up advocacy efforts and engage your volunteers – especially prominent business leaders – in education, from talking to policy makers to educating and informing colleagues or the public about education needs and solutions.
- Step up campus engagement and social media networking efforts – like MySpace, Facebook, etc. – to spread the word among younger generations about how they can get involved.
- Honor volunteers, parents, teachers, schools, students and/or community partners who are making a difference in education.

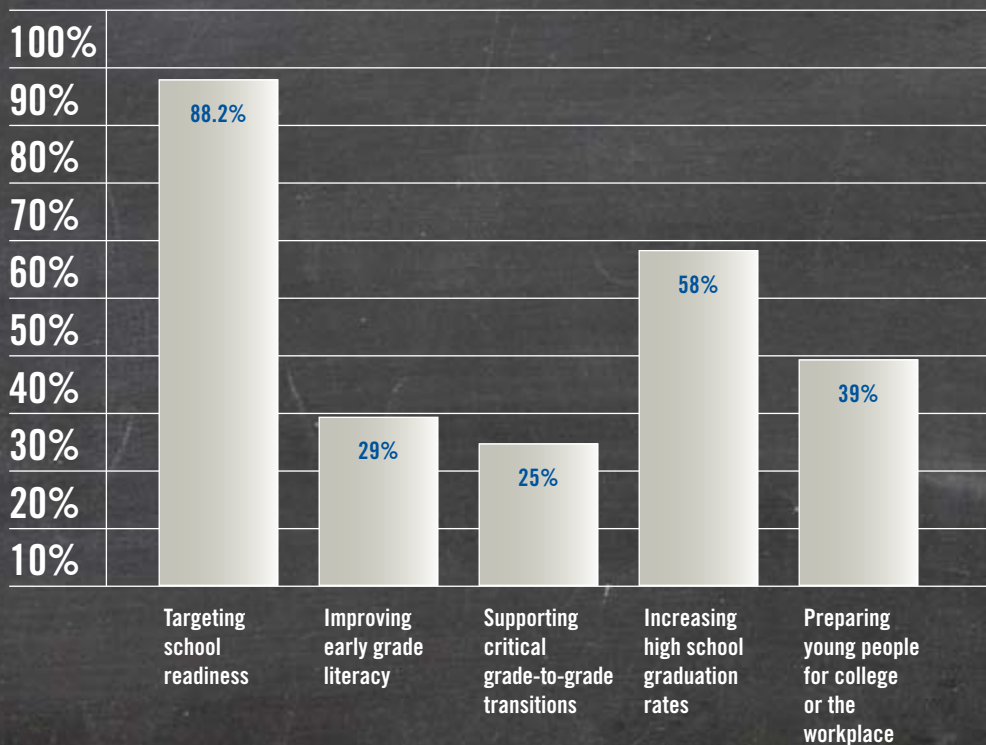
IV. FIVE FOCUS AREAS

Much of our system is already engaged in education and making progress in significant ways. It is our goal that – within 10 years – all United Ways will be engaged in all of these education focus areas, and making significant progress.

The work is ground-breaking, and takes us off the easy path. Here's what one United Way leader says about fledgling efforts to turn around “dropout factory” high schools in the recession-battered Northeast:

“The advice that I would give to other United Ways is to shine a spotlight on the dismal and indisputable data about student achievement; to unite with a core team of partners with large pockets of money and influence, and to maintain an unwavering commitment to execute the agreed-upon vision. I would urge this at the expense of strategies designed to convene interested parties and build consensus. The real work that has to be done requires changing the status quo, which cannot be done through consensus. Take a point of view and lead until the vision's achieved.”

Percentage of Local United Ways Currently Working on Impact Areas



Survey of local United Ways Fall 2008, N=160
Survey respondents tended to be larger United Ways.



Five Key Focus Areas

Our work together over the next 10 years must focus in five key areas if we are to succeed. As part of our strategic partnership outreach, UWA is engaged with many organizations — some as partners, others as prospective partners — across these five focus areas. While the strategy targets are system wide, it is essential that each community set up its own targets for focus area work based on local needs and resources.



1. CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL – EARLY CHILDHOOD

- **Key Indicator** – Percentage of 3 and 4-year olds with commonly recognized school readiness skills.*
- United Ways have a strong history of involvement in early childhood and school readiness, and the focus of this effort will be building on the success of efforts such as Success By 6 and *Born Learning*. Some 80% of the United Way system is engaged in early learning, whether that's funding agencies, leading community impact initiatives or focusing engagement and advocacy efforts on early childhood education.

Children learn best in loving, nurturing relationships and through everyday experiences. These essential connections hard-wire the brain for future learning, especially in the early years. Whether children are at home, with relatives, friends, or in childcare, the quality of early experiences is key to later school success. United Ways are leading initiatives to improve the quality of childcare, family support, early intervention and public awareness activities to equip parents to make the best choices for their families.

Almost 90% of local United Ways are addressing school readiness – including funding agencies that serve children and families, convening communities around early learning, leading Success By 6 initiatives, or taking part in comprehensive improvement efforts. And they are leveraging significant school readiness resources. In a recent survey, 146 local United Ways (a little more than 10% of the system) leveraged \$49 million in 2008, \$30 million from local United Way campaigns.

HERE IS HOW UWA'S EARLY LEARNING PARTNERS STACK UP:

PARTNERSHIPS

- Ad Council
- Association of Children's Museums
- Birth to Five Policy Alliance
- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
- FirstBook
- National Association of Children's Trust Funds
- National League of Cities
- National Strengthening Families Network
- Parents As Teachers
- Smart Start's National Technical Assistance Center
- UCLA

PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT

- National Black Child Development Institute (school readiness and early grade reading – developing faith community leader training kits on child development, promoting learning, reading and language and literacy).
- National Council of La Raza (current partner in Birth to Five Policy Alliance), exploring deeper partnership on school readiness and early grade reading.

SNAPSHOT UNITED WAY & EARLY LEARNING

Some years ago, 60% of Chattanooga's low-income young children were developmentally behind – and coming to school ready to fail. In response, the United Way of Greater Chattanooga crafted a collaborative, community-based response called Invest in Children. It included public awareness, a parent help line, a one-stop resource center called Parents' Place, and a coordinated network of 50 community partners to provide information and hands-on help in poor neighborhoods. After finding that parents lacked literacy skills to read with their children, Success By 6 created mini-libraries – staffed by volunteers – in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Seven years later, the number of disadvantaged children coming to school with school readiness skills on par with their peers had increased by 30%.

More than 660 United Ways and their partners are carrying out the *Born Learning* public engagement campaign. It helps parents, caregivers and communities support early childhood education. Public service advertising, a resource-rich web site (www.bornlearning.org) and educational material (all in English and Spanish) offer fun, concrete ideas to help young children learn. In the campaign's first two years, 12 million parents and children were reached with advertising and materials. 61% of parents who recalled seeing the ads report doing more in everyday activities to support early learning, according to Ad Council data. Other *Born Learning* tools are helping United Ways engage volunteers and business leaders in community support of early learning.

Building on a decade of experience in the area of supporting school readiness, United Way work in this area will provide a roadmap for rolling out and ramping up the other four strategies.

SNAPSHOT

UNITED WAY & 4TH GRADE READING

In responding to the 40% dropout rate in San Antonio, the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County took a non-traditional role: its Issue Council asked what was needed in the community to support parents. The answer? Parents supporting parents.

As a result, parents are engaged as peer support for other parents of 4th-6th graders, connecting them with opportunities, services, help from schools and other family supports.

Partnerships begin with parents: parent representatives from 6 schools go door-to-door to establish or renew relationships. These parents are invited to each school's parent rooms, where they're offered food, coffee and information about academic supports. The parental involvement ultimately leads to deeper engagement and leadership. Parents who are engaged are volunteering in the schools, engaging other parents and building leadership skills — like advocating for bringing computer classes, fitness, ESL, GED and nutrition courses to schools.

The result is tangible — a 300-600% increase in parental involvement on each campus, and improved student behavior and student attendance among targeted families. (The number of students in middle school that were sent to alternative schools dropped by 50%, for example.)

Parent engagement is not only a high school dropout prevention strategy — it's a community-building and community change strategy.

2. EARLY GRADE LITERACY

- **Key Indicator** — Reading on grade level at start of 4th grade (*measured by states as required by law*).
- This will be a growth area. Some local United Ways already have activities and targets for expansion and may be engaging volunteers around reading initiatives but are not pursuing lasting community change strategies.

Early grade literacy forms the foundation of later school success. Until third grade, children are learning to read. After 4th grade, they're reading to learn. Without adequate command of language and ability to comprehend and communicate, they fall behind — and rarely catch up. Many children who repeat grades and later dropout can be identified through low literacy scores in the 4th grade.¹⁰

Our nation is facing a reading crisis. Nationally, some 75% of all children can't read and understand what they're reading by the end of third grade. The numbers are much worse for children of color — only 14% of Latino and 18% of African American children are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade. Ignoring this crisis makes it impossible to meet our high school graduation goal.¹¹

Many United Ways are involved in literacy volunteer programs, and galvanize volunteers around such programs for Day of Action. Some 30% of local United Ways focus on early grade literacy efforts, targeting 3rd or 4th grade reading success. Many of the United Ways working on this issue partner with public television, schools, museums, libraries, book distribution and family literacy programs and a wide variety of other partners in their efforts. The experience and expertise of these local efforts will fuel system-wide learning about how United Ways can add unique value to helping all children read well.

UWA'S PARTNERSHIPS IN THE EARLY GRADE READING ARENA ARE JUST BEING FORMED:

PARTNERSHIPS

- Partnerships are in development

PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT

- American Library Association
- Library Services to Children
- Urban Library Association
- Family Place Libraries
- Libraries of the Future
- Sesame Workshop (as outreach partner for latest edition of Electric Company)
- Annie E. Casey and W.K. Kellogg Foundations

SNAPSHOT

UNITED WAY & MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITION

In Jacksonville, FL, the high school dropout rate for Duval County is twice the overall state rate. The United Way of Northeast Florida convened a focus issue partnership, a group of leaders including local education experts, corporate partners and community stakeholders. They studied the problem, gathered data and scrutinized proven solutions – landing on middle school intervention as a strategy that held out the possibility of doing the most good for the greatest number of people.

United Way and its partners launched a pilot initiative, called Achievers for Life, in Jacksonville's toughest neighborhood in the 2007/2008 school year. It targeted 147 6th graders at two middle schools whose attendance was poor, didn't see themselves as successful in school, or who consistently misbehaved.

Involving parents, supporting families and mentoring were three key strategies. Family Advocates work with students and their families to address obstacles to excelling in school, such as mental-health or behavioral problems, financial instability, employment, and housing. After just one year, statistically significant improvements were demonstrated in areas shown to predict early withdrawal from high school. Results included a 31% improvement in GPAs (10% higher than peers outside the program); 37% fewer suspensions; and 36% fewer failures in math and language arts.

Based on the results in just one year, Achievers for Life is being expanded to four more schools. And as a part of the United Way's New Product Investment campaign, a Tocqueville member pledged \$1 million in fall 2008 to support the initiative.

3. SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

- **Key Indicator** – Middle school student success. (*Specific measures* to be developed.)
- This will be a growth area for United Ways. A few United Ways are zeroing in on middle school transition as a key benchmark for future success, mostly growing out of expanded high school dropout prevention strategies, such as family engagement, focusing on early warning signs, improving the reach and quality of out-of-school time opportunities, etc.

Middle school is where the rubber meets the road. Promotion to 7th grade requires a minimum 1.5 grade-point average. Many disadvantaged children begin to fall behind; greater levels of truancy and behavior problems lead to out-of-school suspension. Fewer than 2 in 10 eighth graders are on track for college-level work. This means that 8 in 10 won't have the knowledge and skills to succeed in high school.¹²

Most high school dropout prevention efforts start in high school – which is too late, according to research. Students' academic achievement by 8th grade has a greater impact on college and career readiness than high school academic work. Research shows that students' readiness for college and career can be boosted with focus on middle school activity.

Students from 4th grade through high school spend less time in school and more time in a variety of other environments, including formal programs and community service. About 25% of local United Ways are already working on these important middle grade transitions. Some have begun to map and improve the quality out-of-school time resources and others are considering how to include these data in their 2-1-1 systems. Engaging parents will be a cross-cutting strategy in all pilots.

HERE IS HOW UWA'S PARTNERSHIPS LOOK WHEN IT COMES TO MIDDLE SCHOOL:

PARTNERSHIPS

- Ready by 21 Partnership
- JC Penney Afterschool Fund
- Ready By 21, to expand mentoring and tutoring with, for and by youth; and adult mentoring across K-12 and beyond

PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Building on JC Penney partnership to develop mapping, expand and improve out-of-school time opportunities for youth

SNAPSHOT

UNITED WAY & HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

In Dallas, where 40% of Dallas School District freshmen will not graduate, the United Way created Destination Graduation as an impact strategy to boost graduation rates.

Partnering with more than 30 public, voluntary and corporate sector community partners, United Way developed an initiative customized for individual schools focusing on specific strategies and outcomes:

- College preparation and SAT training
- Parental involvement
- Mentoring and counseling

At Samuell High School, the program paired nearly 100 students with adult mentors. As a result, 620 new students completed a Princeton Review Course.

Most importantly, program participants advanced to the next grade level at a rate 19% higher than that of peers not participating (2006-2007).

Additionally, their accomplishments increased the entire school promotion rate by 23%.

4. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

- **Key Indicator** – On-time high school graduation rate
- This will be a growth area for many United Ways, facilitated by the strong foundation laid by United Way's National Professional Council (NPC).

The first three focus areas build toward high school graduation, a major milestone on the path to successful adulthood. Over their lifetime, high school graduates earn 74% more than those who dropout.¹³ High school graduation is the single most powerful predictor of whether a young person coming from generations of poverty will break the cycle.

The NPC Mobilization Plan Task Force on Increasing High School Graduation Rates has invested a great deal of energy and expertise into creating a blueprint for mobilization around high school dropout prevention. The Task Force's concrete, research-based strategies and planning processes are being translated into tools and training that every United Way can use. Marketing communications, resource development and policy advocacy tools are being developed so that any United Way can replicate the work. This is an invaluable foundation for the task ahead.

Over 60% of local United Ways report working on high school graduation. This, coupled with the work done by the NPC and our strong national partnerships, will enable us to identify, fuel and replicate best practices in this area more quickly.

HERE ARE UWA'S PARTNERS IN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION EFFORTS:

PARTNERSHIPS

- America's Promise Alliance
- Ready by 21 Partnership

PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Urban League
- American Federation of Teachers
- National Education Association
- Other Labor Unions

5. PREPARED FOR AND COMPLETING TRANSITIONS TO COLLEGE OR ADVANCED TRAINING

- **Key Indicator** — Successful college entrance and completion.
- This will be a growth area for United Ways, though strong foundations exist through efforts such as Ready By 21

Unfortunately, graduating from high school is not a fast track to success. Some 40% of college students need to take remedial courses; that number rises to 60% for African-American and Latino students. Research shows students who take remedial courses are more likely to dropout of college.¹⁴

Many states have been engaged in this effort by virtue of graduation standards and accountability components of school reform. Across the nation, schools are working with employers and higher education to look at what graduation ought to entail.

Almost 40% of United Ways are engaged in preparing young people for success in work or school, and many will be taking leadership roles as states move toward a truly aligned system.

HERE ARE UWA'S PARTNERS IN THE WORK OR SCHOOL BY 21 AREA:

PARTNERSHIPS

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- America's Promise
- Ready By 21

PARTNERSHIPS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Corporate Voices for Working Families, working on strategies to link disconnected youth to career strategies



V. TAKING ON OR STEPPING UP EDUCATION WORK

United Way’s national education strategy will benefit all United Ways, regardless of metro or staff size. The tools, training, technical assistance and research-based frameworks will provide guidance to get started, or scale up.

Wherever you are on the community impact continuum, focusing on education can be part of a win-win strategy that raises visibility and dollars, deepens volunteer engagement, broadens partnerships and positions your United Way as a community change leader.

If you’re already deeply engaged in one of the five education focus areas – like early learning or high school graduation – you may want to think about how to expand your strategies to another focus area.

Consider applying to become a pilot site in one of the newly funded national projects you’ll be hearing about. Making lasting community change will require full engagement across all five focus areas over the long haul.



IF YOU'RE ALREADY DOING EDUCATION WORK

Get aligned

Review the strategies, metrics and interim goals set out in this document for the focus area on which you're working. Look at the education theory of change. Does your strategy align with the national approach? Are all the departments in your United Way on board?

Get bigger

What outcomes are you working towards? Is there a piece that could be expanded — like taking your literacy volunteering initiative from one school to two? How can you take the work to the next level?

Get engaged

Take a look at public engagement strategies outlined in this brochure and look for ways to mobilize even more community leaders, parents and students around education. Check out Day of Action and education volunteerism ideas on www.LiveUnited.org.

Develop message discipline

Is your core messaging focused on education? Americans are strong education supporters, equating it with opportunity. Public support for United Way is growing — boosted by the “can do” spirit of the LIVE UNITED campaign. Use this support to make the connection between United Way work and education.

Get in the loop

Join the new United Way of America Education listserv. This communication channel will promote future learning communities, RFPs and grants. It will be a place to ask, share and debate with others in the United Way system. Want to join? Email mariana.florit@uwa.unitedway.org.

Raise your hand

Volunteer to pilot or field test new United Way and partner tools, such as:

- The new “Common Good Forecaster” which will enable communities to explore how education outcomes will affect health and income at a county level;
- The Early Development Instrument, a population measure of school readiness by zip code or out-of-school-time;
- The Ready By 21 landscape mapping tool to create new data for your 2-1-1.

IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT DOING EDUCATION WORK

Get the facts

Look at your community data about education gaps and challenges in your community. Local school system officials are the best starting point if you don't already have data. Talk to your volunteers and board members to discern their passions and concerns around education. Map the landscape in your community, assessing needs and resources and consider including this data in your 2-1-1 database.

Get connected

Find out who is already in the game. Does United Way need to fill a niche or enhance another ongoing effort?

Get in the loop

Join the new United Way of America Education listserv. This communication channel will promote future learning communities, RFPs and grants. It will be a place to ask, share and debate with others in the United Way system. Want to join? Email mariana.florit@uwa.unitedway.org.

Endnotes

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¹ Zill, Nicholas and West, Jerry, for the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Entering Kindergarten: A Portrait of American Children When They Begin School: Findings from The Condition of Education 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001035.pdf>.

² National Assessment of Educational Progress scores gathered by National Center for Education Statistics
www.nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD

³ Education Week. (2008, June 5). *Diplomas Count 2008: School to College, Can State P-16 Councils Ease the Transition?* Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center

⁴ Population Reference Bureau calculation of data from the American Community Survey

⁵ Zill and West, *Entering Kindergarten: A Portrait of American Children When They Begin School: Findings from The Condition of Education 2000*.

⁶ Ramey, Craig T. & Sharon L. *Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life*. Goddard Press, Inc. (January 1999)

⁷ *Creating a Children-First Nation and a First-Class Economy*, Invest in Kids Partnership; *Preschool for All: Priority for American Business Leaders*, Committee of Economic Development

⁸ Chang, Hedy N.; Romero, Mariajosé. *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, Sept. 2008.
http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html

⁹ *Are They Really Ready To Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, by the U.S. Conference Board Nov. 2006

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* While there is not yet a national consensus on how to measure school readiness, United Way of America is working with UCLA on a geo-mapping measurement project that overlays data to show how children in specific areas are doing and what assets exist in their neighborhoods. When fully implemented, this approach will produce the key data communities need to assess the results of their school readiness efforts.

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¹⁰ Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2003). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹¹ www.strongamericanschools.org, drawn from National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2007). *The Nation's Report Card*, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

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¹² ACT (2006). *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School*. ACT: Des Moines, IA

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¹³ Ibid.

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¹⁴ Romer, et al. (2008). *Diploma to Nowhere*. Strong American Schools: Washington, DC.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

United Way is just beginning to build its toolkit of resources on education impact strategies. You can access those tools on United Way Online (keyword: Education).

- **School readiness** – We have a wealth of early learning resources for early learning work, including a resource list (contact mariana.florit@uwa.unitedway.org) and many tips, tools and templates on www.BornLearning.org's Campaign Central.
- **High school** – The NPC Mobilization Plan Blueprint and High School Graduation Rate Toolkit, with marketing communications, resource development and policy advocacy tools are being developed for United Ways and are accessible on United Way Online (keyword: Education).

NEED MORE INFORMATION ON ANY EDUCATION ISSUES?

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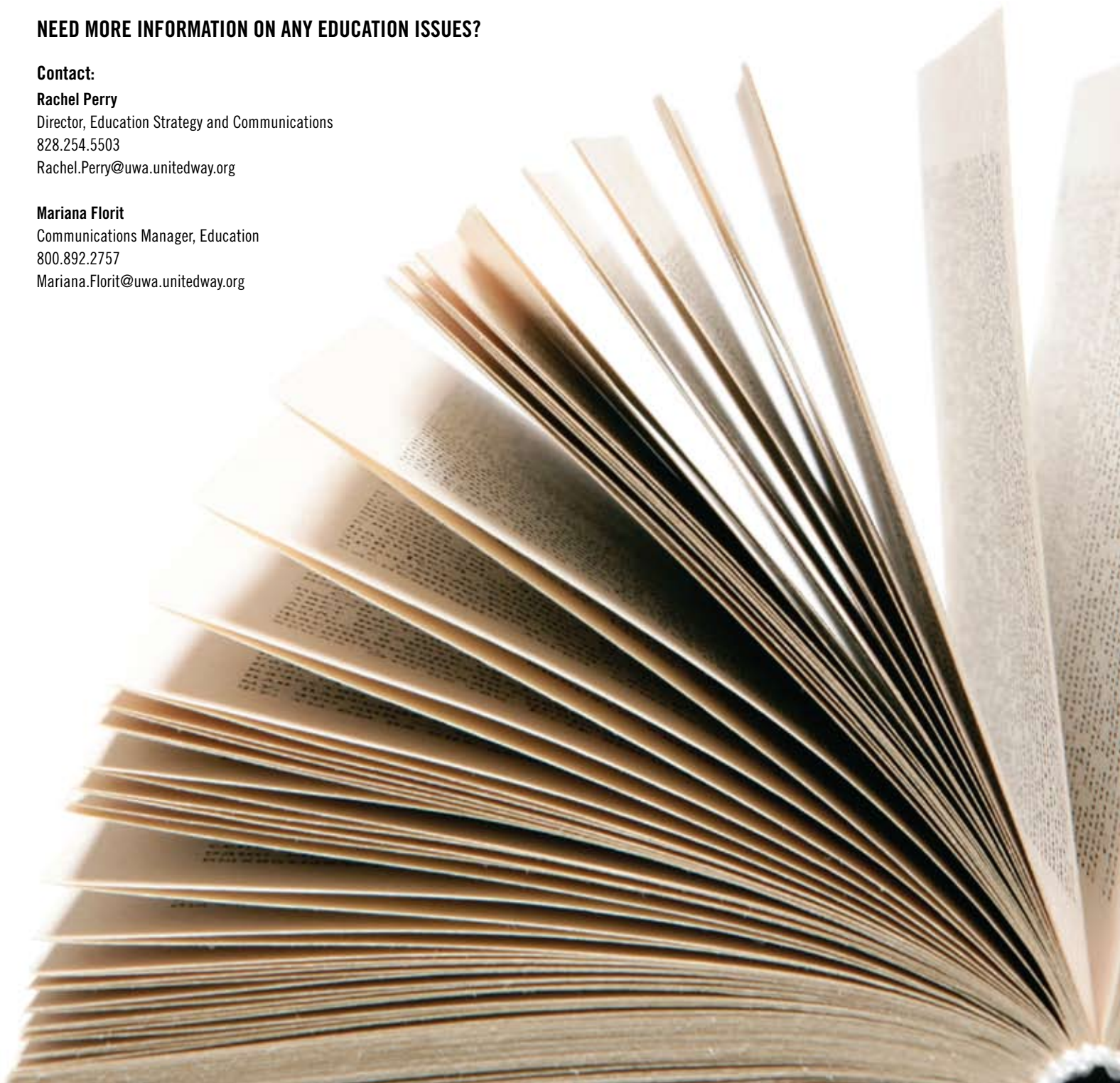
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